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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

The Situation in Communist China

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
8 October 1971

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Communist China

Summary

The overriding feature of the Chinese scene remains the high tension within the ruling politburo. This was manifested early last month in an unprecedented decision to curtail the traditional 1 October National Day celebrations [redacted] Despite the reappearance of Mao Tse-tung on 8 October, the origins of the trouble are still shrouded in mystery; its progress and outcome are equally murky. We are, however, confident that Peking is faced with problems within the leadership and that these problems are critical ones. As the drama unfolds, it has seemed likely that its central theme revolves around a complex set of internal, rather than external, factors. In particular, there has been no evidence that it has disrupted the forward momentum in Sino-US relations or that it has involved new strains in Sino-Soviet bilateral relations. It also does not appear related to any escalation of tensions on the border, even in the aftermath of the crash of a Chinese transport in Mongolia.

We now believe that some sort of major leadership conclave opened in Peking the weekend of 11-12 September. [redacted] the Mongolian incident came on the night of 12-13 September. These

Note: This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence, the Office of Strategic Research and the Office of Economic Research.

[redacted]

[redacted]

The Question of Timing

1. There is good evidence that the ruling politburo members who are based in Peking went into a deep huddle on 11 September. Premier Chou En-lai canceled a session with a visiting Japanese delegation on that day and did not reappear in public until the 16th. With two exceptions, the remaining normally active politburo members were out of the limelight for the same period. Thus, the event or events which triggered the current upheaval probably occurred on or before 11 September. The date assumes added importance because it rules out the possibility that the still unexplained crash of a Chinese aircraft over Mongolia on the night of 12-13 September initiated the turmoil in Peking. The flight of the aircraft, however, may well be connected with the turmoil.

2. The most obvious result of the conclave was a decision to cancel the mammoth parade on National Day which has traditionally brought a full-scale leadership turnout headed by Mao Tse-tung and Lin Piao. Since illness or purge has never before caused an alteration of the scenario, the decision to cancel implied that 1) either Mao or Lin was seriously ill or incapacitated, or 2) the power equation within the politburo was in the process of being drastically altered. The omission of a ranked leadership show on National Day, Premier Chou En-lai's failure to host a reception or give his customary policy speech on the eve of the holiday, and the nonappearance of the customary National Day editorial all pointed in the same direction. Mao greeted Haile Selassie on 8 October, and cleared up one aspect of the mystery. The fact remains that Lin, three ranking military leaders at the center, and one regional commander--all politburo members--have not appeared publicly since 10 September. The political futures of some, or just possibly all, of these five may well be at the root of the current problems.

[redacted]

has been warned about Russian "pressures," and numerous "war preparations" instructions have been issued since mid-September. This theme, however, seems to have been seized on by some to provide a popular rationale for developments. The measures involved seem primarily related to maintaining troop control and to tightening internal security.

The Great Air Standdown

14. There is very likely a relationship between the political difficulties described, [redacted] and the mysterious crash of a Chinese aircraft in Mongolia. [redacted]

The Crash

16. Both Mongolian and Soviet press reports claim that the crashed aircraft was a jet and suggested that it was subordinated to the military. [redacted] China has

[redacted]

[redacted]

idents (British planes similar to Boeing's
tained from Pakistan. They are under mili-
ntrol for VIP use. [redacted]

. The Chinese have explained that the lost
t was a civil liner that had navigation prob-
We think we have, however, been able to account
high-performance civilian airliners (except
Trident) since the crash date. Moreover, there
known domestic civil flights along China's
with Mongolia, and the only civil Chinese
to the Soviet Union which pass near the area
Wednesdays, during the day. (The crash was
onday.)

. If the aircraft that crashed in Mongolia
ied a Trident out of Peking, the flight may
volved an attempted defection, but this is
certain. [redacted]

[redacted]

14 Sept	Air France makes flight from Rangoon into Shanghai and two Chinese civil flights connected with Air France.

[redacted]

15 Sept	Civil aircraft resume flights on a reduced scale; [redacted]
16 Sept	Premier Chou resumes normal schedule of appearances; other civilian politburo members and senior general Yeh Chien-ying also begin to appear regularly.

[redacted]

21 Sept	Newsmen in Peking report that the preparations for the National Day parade that had been under way since late August were suspended sometime during the week of 12-18 September.
22 Sept	Spokesmen of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Peking inform diplomatic community that changes in National Day scenario merely a "reform."
22 Sept	Army Logistics Chief Chiu Hui-tso shows up at diplomatic reception; first active military leader to appear since 10 September; Li Te-sheng, director of the GPD, shows up on 24 September.

[redacted]

23 Sept	Provincial radiobroadcast from Anhwei identifies a new man in the post of Nanking Military Region commander, raising questions about the current status of Hsu Shih-yu; Hsu has not been seen since 6 June.

[redacted]

24-28 Sept	Vice Premier Li Hsien-nien leads government economic delegation to North Vietnam.
25 Sept	People's Daily article lashes out against unidentified members of "Confucius shop"; hints that on the one hand the Soviets have been trying to utilize this group while threatening "nuclear blackmail" on the other.

[redacted]

29 Sept	Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman in Peking informs diplomatic community that Chou's traditional banquet on the eve (30 September) of National Day will be replaced by a reception sponsored by the MFA.

[redacted]

30 Sept	TASS announces on the morning of 30 September that a Chinese aircraft crashed in Mongolia on the night of 12-13 September; Soviets claim that it was a military plane;

Chinese diplomats in Moscow acknowledge that there was a crash but insist that it was a civil aircraft that had committed a navigation error.

30 Sept — Peking fails to publish usual editorial on the eve of National Day.

2-3 Oct — Press report from France claims that foreign trade minister Pai Hsiang-kuo, on a tour of the provinces, was awakened in the middle of the night of 2-3 October by Chinese Embassy officials who made a special 135-mile trip from Paris.

5 Oct — Chinese trade delegation presently visiting Denmark informed Copenhagen Foreign Office at 0400 hours in the morning that they had "just received" instructions from Peking requiring their return on 10 October, one day earlier than scheduled, in order to attend "a meeting."

5 Oct — Washington and Peking announced simultaneously that Dr. Kissinger will visit Peking in the latter part of October to make

"concrete arrangements" for the President's trip; Peking announcement released at 1000 hours, 5 October, Washington time.

8 Oct — Mao Tse-tung received visiting Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie, according to press sources close to the Ethiopian delegation. Mao reportedly looked well.